

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Flagstaff Parks and Recreation Committee and City Council,

I am writing today in support of the Avery family's request to change the name of the Buffalo Park Trail to The Nate Avery Trail. The reasons that I believe the name change is appropriate are simple, much like Nate himself. To me, Nate embodied the very spirit of Flagstaff. Despite his "big city" education and his extraordinary talents as a Neurosurgeon, Nate was first and foremost a Flagstaff boy. He was a highly skilled Pediatric Neurosurgeon, and once his long years of training were complete, he could've written his own ticket. He could've chosen to practice at the likes of Stanford or Johns Hopkins, and they would have been lucky to have him. While in training, he invented and patented a unique neurosurgical device. He could have published scientific articles, sought prestige and academic fame. Instead, he chose to bring his talents back home, to share with the community that he so dearly loved. He had tons of "cred", and had every right to be boastful or proud, but he never was. Instead, he was just a sweet, goofy kid in a grown-up body with a crooked perpetual grin, always ready to lend a hand or give a smile. The most telling moment at his memorial, which was attended by almost 2500 people, was when his brother Chris asked for anyone whom Nate had ever done a favor for to raise their hands. Every single person raised their hand. How many of us are that generous with our time and energy?

Through that boundless energy, he poured his heart into bettering our community. He worked diligently to educate himself and others in support of the public school override, which is up for a re-vote. Were it not for Nate attending "townhall" meetings and taking it upon himself to explain the urgent need for the override to those present, I believe the vote would have failed. He was instrumental in helping to organize the WingDing, an annual fundraiser to benefit the Whale Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides free or low-cost mental health care to Grand Canyon river guides. He even donated a spine surgery to the highest bidder for the WingDing silent auction--- a STEAL at \$1200, anesthesia included!!

As a fellow physician, I was blessed to work closely with Nate on the sickest children. Although he took the surgical portion very seriously, he was equally intent on making sure the head bandage was whimsical and fun. I asked him once why he liked the head bandages so much, and he said, "Because that way, their parents will feel like WE love their child, too." And THAT is the heart of what Nate was all about. I have seen medical colleagues come and go, but I have NEVER, in 25 years of practice, seen the outpouring of love and the communal sense of loss that we have felt since Nate's too-soon departure. The BLE stickers that you see all over town? They're EVERYWHERE in the hospital, and there are more popping up everyday, and not just in the O.R., or on the ward where he sent his patients after surgery. They're in the staff lounge on Labor and Delivery. They're on the portable Endoscopy cart. The MRI machine. The cabinet door in the E.R. The billing office. The education department. They're on the anesthesia carts, on the secretary's desk, on the housekeeper's cleaning carts. And they're on more cars than I can count,

including nearly every other physician's car. They say there's only one degree of separation in Flag, but when it comes to Nate, I think it's more like zero degrees---I can't think of anyone who has touched so many people in such a profound way, all the while maintaining his humility and proclaiming his unabashed adoration of the town he called home. Some days, I feel like very single person in Flagstaff knew Nate.

Many folks covet our forest trails for running, and rightly so, but Nate had simpler pleasures. He preferred to run around Buffalo Park, right in the heart of Flagstaff, surrounded by the mountains and city he loved. It never lost its allure for him. If you asked him how his run at Buffalo Park was, he would exult "Best Day Ever!" Many people utilize the Buffalo Park trail in their pursuit of a happier, healthier life...in short, in pursuit of their own Best Life Ever. How fitting it would be for all those people who loved Nate and who were loved by him to see his name as they head out with their families and pets for an evening stroll or jog. Perhaps they would smile. Perhaps they would feel gratitude for something he had done for them---whether it was to fix their hurting back, or save their child from a brain tumor, or hotwire their boat for them on the launch ramp at Lake Powell after somebody forgot the keys at home in Flagstaff (um... that might have been me...) Perhaps they would feel that he is, in a way, still with them---still with us all.

So my reasons for wanting the name change are simple: He loved us and he loved our community. There is hardly a person in town that did not benefit from his generosity, his keen mind, or his willingness to simply be a friend. He wasn't some hoity-toity surgeon--- he was Everyman, whose greatest joy was living his life to its fullest and expressing unbridled appreciation for the joy that it brought. His name on the trail would serve as a beautiful reminder that despite our differences, we are all the same, and that each of us can choose at any time to live our Best Life Ever. Who better to represent our most beautiful, most central open space than Nate?

Sincerely,

Michelle Grua